

The Suffrage Sham

By Harry Stone

The mentally emancipated worker cannot help but view with distrust the recent granting, after many years of bitter struggle, of the right of suffrage to more than twenty million women. The idea is spreading among the workers more and more that no permanent good can ever be gotten, under the capitalist system, through the medium of voting. When they really want anything they use other means—the strike, for instance. This is true of the every day struggle. Voting, also, cuts little figure in the calculations of those who are seriously thinking and working to organize the workers for future control of industry and government.

But, more to the point, can woman suffrage, excepting through its educational possibilities, help the masses of working people? NO. In the first place, the capitalist politicians wouldn't have granted it if this were the case. They are in the business of hamstringing the working class, not helping it out. But more detailed reasons why woman suffrage does not menace the control of the parasite class can be given if they are needed.

Working Women in Minority

The majority of women who got the vote and who will use it most were the women of the upper crust and middle-class elements. These women are well satisfied with things as they are and will not support any effort to change them by the ballot or other means. They can be safely trusted to act on the side of the capitalists and against the workers whenever the issue is raised in an election. Their votes, as well as their hearts, will be where their treasure is.

Besides the fact that a majority of the women voters will be of non-working class elements, it is the way the suffrage is juggled and controlled that makes assurance doubly sure for the ruling class. Throughout the country we see the wives of the rich men organizing propaganda societies for the purpose of "educating" women voters to their particular brand of politics. The mediums of publicity are open to them—the press, pulpits, magazines, etc. The working class press and other means of spreading propaganda and information are pitifully small in comparison.

Woman suffrage, on the whole, will be a con-

servative force. Indeed, that is why the capitalist class permitted women to have the vote. In order to overcome the growing disillusionment among the workers in regard to the ballot, the ruling class must steadily increase—or, rather, pretend to increase—suffrage rights. It is hardly likely that suffrage rights will be taken away entirely, although it has been done, in effect, in many cases by short-sighted politicians such as those who controlled the New York Assembly and who fired out the five elected socialists because they didn't like their looks.

The Ballot Box Illusion.

But the "wise" capitalists are not in favor of this kind of action because that destroys one of their strongest weapons—the illusion of the workers that through the ballot they really have something to say about the government.

Capitalism needs for its preservation every tool that it now makes use of. As long as the workers are willing to have their slavery confirmed by elections, the ruling class will not object. They will even permit special elections in between the regular ones for that purpose, if necessary.

As we have said, this delusion about the value and power of the ballot in the hands of the workers is one of the things that holds capitalist rule up. Sooner or later we have got to get it out of our heads. It is true that working class parties in other countries have made good use of political campaigns for propaganda purposes. And once in a while a true revolutionist like Liebknecht has been elected to a legislative body and used it as a sounding board for revolutionary speeches. This is necessary to be done, and no doubt it will be done here in this country.

But this is only sabotaging the governmental institutions not trying to use them for the purpose of emancipating the workers. This is a job that cannot be done through the use of any machinery made for the purpose of enslaving them. A government suited to the needs of the working class would be one in which the right to vote would be restricted to productive workers. Then all the power would lie in their hands and suffrage would really mean something.